

Journal of the History of Sexuality, 26, 3, 2017

Interracial Relationships and the “Brown Baby Question”: Black GIs, White British Women and their Mixed Race Offspring in World War II

Lucy Bland

Anglia Ruskin University

Sergeant Lomax, an African-American soldier, arrived back in Ohio at the end of the Second World War; he had been stationed in England for much of his time away. He had a confession to make to his wife, Betty. In February 1949 she recounted their exchange to the Pittsburgh Courier, a leading black American newspaper: “He said: ‘I’ve been gone a long time...about three years...that’s a long time for a fellow to be away from his wife. In the meantime I met a girl. She was nice, she was friendly, and Betty, I was very lonesome, so...what I’m trying to say is that there’s to be a child. Betty, you don’t have to answer right away, but would you agree to take this child?’”¹ The boy had been born in December 1945 and was given the same name as his father:

Many thanks to David Killingray for his generous sharing of sources and very helpful comments, to Clive Webb for locating some of the African-American press references, to the “History Girls” (Clare Midgley, Alison Oram, Krisztina Robert, Katharina Rowold, and Cornelia Usborne) for their constructive support and to two anonymous readers who gave very useful feedback.

¹ “Our Brown Baby,” Pittsburgh Courier 19 February 1949. My thanks to Valerie Bergson for putting me in touch with Leon Lomax, and to Leon for sending me the Pittsburgh Courier cuttings.

Leon Lomax. He was put into a children's home in Britain by his single mother. With great difficulty, Leon senior eventually managed to have his son flown out to the United States, arriving in January 1949. The Pittsburgh Courier called his arrival "the story of the year!...The first 'Brown Baby' adopted by an American couple to reach America."² "Brown babies" was the name given at the time by the African-American press to the mixed-race children born to black American soldiers and British and European women (the vast majority of whom were white) during or soon after the war.³ One African-American paper, the Chicago Defender, sometimes also referred to them as 'tan-yank babies.'⁴ To the Pittsburgh Courier "the entire 'Brown Baby' question is one of the most controversial subjects in this country today. It is a question that involves two great nations – the United States of America and Great Britain."⁵ The nature of this "controversial subject" – the "'Brown Baby' question" - is the focus of this article.

² "Courier finds First 'Brown Baby'," Pittsburgh Courier 12 February 1949.

³ For Germany see Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria, "'Germany's 'Brown Babies' must be Helped! Will you?': U.S. Adoption Plans for Afro-German Children, 1950-1955," Callaloo, vol 26, no 2, Spring 2003: 342-362; Heide Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Post-War Germany and America (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sabine Lee, "A Forgotten Legacy of the Second World War: GI Children in Post-War Britain and Germany," Contemporary European History, vol 20, 2, May 2011: 157-181.

⁴ See "Ship Tan-Yank Babies to US," Chicago Defender 12 April 1947; "With the Tan-Yank Babies in England," Chicago Defender 9 August 1947.

⁵ "First Adopted 'Brown Baby' is Here!" Pittsburgh Courier 12 February 1949.

The British “brown babies” were the result of relationships formed between British women and African-American troops stationed in Britain from 1942 in preparation for an invasion of France. From the beginning there was concern in official circles about the consequences of the presence of black GIs. Home Secretary Herbert Morrison for example was anxious that “the procreation of half-caste children” would create “a difficult social problem.”⁶ He and others in the War Cabinet would have preferred no black GIs to be sent at all. However black troops did indeed arrive, for the Pentagon decreed that the percentage of black American troops in every theatre of war should reflect their percentage in the U.S. as a whole, namely ten per cent.⁷ By the end of the war, of the nearly three million U.S. soldiers who had passed through Britain, up to 300,000 were African-American.⁸

Unlike the British government, British civilians largely reacted positively to the presence of black GIs. A report of the Home Intelligence Unit (an organization set up in 1940 to monitor morale) noted the numerous references to “the extremely pleasing

⁶ Quoted in Graham Smith, When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987): 73.

⁷ David Reynolds, Rich Relations: the American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945 (London: Harper Collins, 1995): 217.

⁸ Reynolds states that there were 130,000 black GIs in Britain on D-Day, but he does not give figures for the entire period. See , Rich Relations, 227. W.E.B. DuBois claimed that the numbers of black GIs in Britain during the war were “not less than half a million,” which is very probably an over-estimation. W.E.B. DuBois “GIs Leave Good Impression on England, DuBois Finds,” The Chicago Defender 24 Nov 1945.

manners of the coloured troops.”⁹ Many may have agreed with the response of a West Country farmer when asked about the GIs: “I love the Americans, but I don’t like those white ones that they have brought with them.”¹⁰ Historian Graham Smith suggests that one of the reasons the black GIs were seen as better mannered was that while the white GIs constantly complained about Britain’s lack of modern conveniences – no refrigerators, no central heating, few cars – most of the black GIs were not used to such luxuries at home and thus did not have reason to find fault.¹¹ However, British attitudes were frequently condescending and informed by negative stereotypes. For example, the June 1943 Home Intelligence Report British Public Feeling about America, which drew together some of the remarks people had made over the past year and a half, noted (without comment) “a tendency to regard the negroes as ‘childish, happy and naïve fellows who mean no harm’.” Nevertheless, many people felt strongly that “discrimination is undemocratic, particularly when black and white are both fighting for democracy.”¹²

Many of the British were shocked by the white GIs’ racist attitudes, and stressed British tolerance in contrast to the segregation of the American armed forces, but they did not necessarily condone intimacy, indeed were often hostile to interracial sex and

⁹ See for example Home Intelligence Weekly Report, 23 July, 1942: 4; 13 August 1942: 5; 19 August 1942: 5, INF1/292, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA).

¹⁰ Quoted in When Jim Crow met John Bull: 118-9.

¹¹ *Ibid*: 123.

¹² British Public Feeling about America: a Report by Home Intelligence Division (Ministry of Information, June 1943) FO371/44601, TNA. Emphasis in the original.

marriage.¹³ While many were committed to being polite and welcoming hosts (usefully termed “friendly but brief” by historian Wendy Webster)¹⁴ they drew the line at sexual relations. A Home Intelligence Report in August 1942 noted that “adverse comment is reported over girls who ‘walk out’ with coloured troops.”¹⁵

Controlling Relationships between Black Americans and British Women

A number of white Americans in Britain took drastic action to try and stop relationships between black GIs and white women. In July 1944 The Crisis, the paper of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), reported “a white Southern lieutenant in a Negro anti-aircraft company who just could not stand to see his men enjoying the courtesies extended by the white women of a certain Eastern town. He posted a notice that any type of association with white women is regarded as rape, and reminded his men that the penalty for rape during wartime is death.”¹⁶ But it was not just the white Americans who were trying to prevent interracial relations. Once black GIs arrived in Britain there were various attempts by the British government as well. The War Office in August 1942 decreed that the British Army should lecture their

¹³ See Sonya O. Rose, “Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain,” The International History Review, XIX, February 1997: 154.

¹⁴ Wendy Webster, “‘Fit to Fight, Fit to Mix’: Sexual Patriotism in Second World War Britain,” Women’s History Review, 22, no. 4, (2013): 607-624.

¹⁵ Home Intelligence Weekly Report 19 Aug 1942, 5.

¹⁶ Editorial, “Black and White Rape”, The Crisis July 1944: 217. Emphasis in the original.

troops, including the women in the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service), on the need to keep contact with black GIs to a minimum. Local police were to report women soldiers found with black GIs.¹⁷ The Defense of the Realm Act was used to prosecute women for trespass or loitering if found with black GIs on military premises.¹⁸ Further, girls under 18 were subject to apprehension under the Children and Young Person's Act of 1933 if police thought they were in 'grave moral danger' – a state assumed more likely if the soldiers they were with were black.¹⁹

In August 1942 Major-General Dowler, in charge of the Southern Command (the South of England) where a large proportion of black GIs were stationed, issued a paper headed "Notes on Relations with Coloured Troops" and sent it to District Commanders in his area; it was subsequently distributed more widely. The paper was not official, and indeed it had been decreed by the War Cabinet that no written instructions should be distributed on the subject of "coloured troops" as the issue was very "delicate", but in fact Dowler's notes were subsequently largely approved by the War Office, and informed its own written advice given out later to the British Army and Royal Air Force. Dowler's paper was overtly racist, with remarks such as "coloured men...work hard when they have no money and when they have money they prefer to do nothing until it is gone. In short they do not have the white man's ability to think and act to a plan." One of Dowler's proposals was that "white women should not associate with coloured men. It follows then, they should not walk out, dance, or drink

¹⁷ Rose, "Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain": 155.

¹⁸ "Regional Commissioner's Report," FO 371/34126, A6556, TNA.

¹⁹ Rose, "Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain": 157.

with them.”²⁰ The War Cabinet paper did not go quite this far, but suggested that “for a white woman to go about in the company of a Negro American is likely to lead to controversy and ill-feeling, it may also be misunderstood by the Negro troops themselves.”²¹ Further, Home Secretary Morrison warned his colleagues in the War Cabinet that “morale of British troops is likely to be upset by rumours that their wives and daughters are being debauched by American coloured troops.”²²

Britain was formally opposed to U.S. military segregation (the army stayed segregated until 1948), but did not interfere with the segregation arrangements that the Americans set in place in towns and villages around the country. The British government clearly wished to be discreet about this tacit support for it was caught in a dilemma: it needed to keep on the right side of the USA, and thus was not going to oppose segregation openly, but it did not want to disaffect the West Indians who had come over to join the British armed forces or to work in munitions. In fact parliamentary papers show

²⁰ Anonymous [Major General A.A.B. Dowler] “Notes on Relations with Coloured Troops”, nd [7 August 1942], annexed to Secretary for War “United States Coloured Troops in the United Kingdom”, Memorandum, September 1942, PREM4/26/9, TNA.

²¹ “United States Negro Troops in the United Kingdom, n.d. [October 1942], PREM4/26/9, TNA.

²² Home Secretary, “United States Coloured Troops in the United Kingdom”, Memorandum, 10 October 1942, PREM4/26/9.

ongoing tension and disagreements between the Colonial Office and other Offices.²³ The segregation set up across the country involved passes for entry to towns near to American bases; in some towns, access for blacks and whites was given on different days, while other towns were permanently designated “whites only” or “blacks only.” In many villages, pubs too were segregated along color lines, and dances were held for black GIs one evening, whites the next.

The Sexual Allure of the Americans

Most people’s knowledge of Americans came from the cinema, which they attended regularly, often as much as twice a week. A group of British probation workers later reflected on the role of Hollywood in girls’ perception of the GIs: “To girls brought up on the cinema, who copied the dress, hair styles and manners of Hollywood stars, the sudden influx of Americans, speaking like the films, who actually lived in the magic country, and who had plenty of money, at once went to the girls’ heads.”²⁴ American

²³ This also operated in discussions of the recruitment of West Indian women. See Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War 11 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991): 82-106.

²⁴ Quoted in Sheila Ferguson and Hilde Fitzgerald History of the Second World War: Studies in the Social Services (London: HMSO, 1954) 97. And see Marilyn Lake, “The Desire for a Yank: Sexual Relations between Australian Women and American Servicemen during World War 11”, Journal of the History of Sexuality, 2,4, (1991): 621-33.

soldiers did indeed have “plenty of money”, earning on average five times as much as British soldiers.²⁵ It was not for nothing that comedian Tommy Trinder described them as “over-paid, over-fed, over-sexed, and over here.” British soldiers did not get the cheap hand-outs of cigarettes and chocolate, let alone access to nylons (stockings), an especial delight for British women who faced with stringent rationing were resorting to staining their legs brown with gravy powder and drawing a seam up the back with an eye pencil.²⁶ The American response to the name-calling was predictable: Brits were: “underpaid, underfed, under-sexed and under Eisenhower.”

For some women, black GIs were particularly attractive. Writing just after the war, prominent African American civil rights activist and journalist W.E.B DuBois suggested why: “The Negroes were often diffident and apologetic ... [they] asked at bars for a drink; they asked if they could be served in restaurants; they did not, like so many white Americans, order, demand and swagger.”²⁷ The attraction may have also related to black American culture being so focused on dance and music. As the African-American magazine *Ebony* asserted in 1946: “The average Negro GI had one advantage over his white army brother: he knew how to jitterbug. English girls love to dance.”²⁸ White men, whether they be British or American, were generally thought to be poor dancers, but for British women, dancing was their main leisure pursuit

²⁵ “Notes on Interview with the Adjutant-General War Office. American Army and Air Force. The Colour Bar.” July 1942, CO876/14, TNA.

²⁶ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars (London: Pandora, 1987): 253.

²⁷ DuBois, “GIs leave good impression on England”.

²⁸ “Fatherless Children Check the Liberalism of British,” *Ebony* 19 November 1946.

throughout the 1920s, 30s and into the 40s – along with visits to ‘the pictures’.²⁹ British women’s attraction to black GIs as men with whom to have a good time could be seen as buying into the stereotype of black men as “fun-loving” and “having the beat” but not (necessarily) the brains. “Having a good time” however was precisely what young women wanted; most of them were not looking for a husband (many already had husbands, temporarily absent), or indeed for a father of future children.

If young women were known to have been dancing with black GIs, they tended to be ostracized by white Americans.³⁰ The women were identifiable because, according to a fifteen-year-old factory worker from Pollock, near Glasgow, white GIs made a note of their names: “If you danced with the coloured Americans you were blacklisted by the white ones. They kept a list at the camp of these girls.”³¹ Young women were generally blamed for leading GIs on, especially the black GIs. The British Public Feeling about America report implied why it was the girls who tended to be blamed: “the coloured men are looked on as ‘not really responsible persons’,” a view that went hand in hand with the idea that black people were “childish, happy and naïve.”³² The “over-sexed” GI caricature was matched by that of the British “good-

²⁹ See Mica Nava, Visceral Cosmopolitanism (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007) 75-94; Allison Jean Albra, “On with the Dance: Nation, Culture and Popular Dancing in Britain, 1918-1945” (PhD, University of Michigan, 2009) chapter 7.

³⁰ Juliet Gardiner, “Over Here”: the GIs in Wartime Britain (London: Collins & Brown, 1992): 156.

³¹ Quoted in Norman Longmate, The GIs: the Americans in Britain, 1942-1945 (London: Hutchinson, 1975):132.

³² British Public Feeling about America

time” girl.³³ Many young women were living away from home, outside the control of family and community, and they understandably sought adventure and romance. Married women also had new freedoms. As the African-American newspaper Liberty was to comment in December 1946, writing about wartime interracial relationships in Liverpool: “You shouldn’t judge the Liverpool girls too severely...Their own men had been away, overseas...The bombings had made their shabby homes shabbier; the war had made it impossible to brighten their drab lives.” The article also noted that: “American Negroes treated for the first time in their lives ‘like white folks’...so eager to find someone to spend their incredible wealth on, could give the girls fun and luxuries their husbands had never been able to give them.”³⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, writing earlier that year in the Chicago Defender, took a similar position: “I did not blame the women of England nor gloat over them. Their lives were torn apart, their men sent away and their incomes uncertain.”³⁵

African Americans may not have blamed the women, but to many in Britain the women’s sexual behavior, whether pre-marital or adulterous, was seen as damaging to Britain’s national reputation – their actions were deemed “unpatriotic.”³⁶ British women in relationships with black GIs were frequently condemned as sluts and loose women, yet it was not as if they could legalize the relationships through marriage. As the Chicago Defender pointed out: “In order to marry, all overseas troops must receive

³³ See Sonya O. Rose, Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 80-82

³⁴ Alfred Eris, “Britain’s Mulatto ‘GI’ Babies”, Liberty 7 December 1946.

³⁵ W.E.B. DuBois “The Winds of Change”, Chicago Defender 15 June 1946.

³⁶ See Rose, Which People’s War? : 80-82.

permission of their commanding officers. The white officers in command of Negro troops are reluctant to grant such permission...there is documentary evidence that permission has been denied solely on the basis of race. This even in cases where the girl may be pregnant.”³⁷ Indeed one black GI, on informing his commanding officer that he wished to marry his pregnant white girl-friend, was warned that if he did any such thing, he would be charged with rape.³⁸ African-American journalist and former GI Ormus Davenport claimed that the U.S. Army unofficially had a “‘gentleman’s agreement’ which said ‘No negro soldier or sailor will be given permission to marry any British white girl!’...Not one GI bride going back to the U.S. under the U.S. government scheme is the wife of a Negro.”³⁹ After reading Davenport’s article Tom Driberg, Labour Member of Parliament, raised the issue in the House of Commons. In response the Foreign Office approached the American Embassy whose officials denied any knowledge of such a ban, although the Foreign Office did note that “it seems very unlikely that the U.S. army would publicly admit to having issued such orders.”⁴⁰ Even had interracial marriage been permitted, marriages back home in the United States may well have been deemed illegal, for 30 of the 48 U.S. states still had anti-miscegenation

³⁷ Henry Lee Moon, ‘Army Hits Negro Babies of Soldiers and British Mothers,’ The Chicago Defender 28 April, 1945:11

³⁸ Janet Baker, “‘Lest We Forget’: The Children We Left Behind” (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 2000): 42.

³⁹ Ormus Davenport, “U.S. Prejudice dooms 1,000 British Babies,” *Reynolds News* 9 February 1947.

⁴⁰ “Problem of Illegitimate Half-Caste Children of US Negro Servicemen and British Girls,” FO 371/97/AN668/13/45, TNA.

laws. One English woman, Margaret Goosey, went in 1947 to Virginia to marry her ex-GI black boyfriend. She was jailed and deported and he was sent to a State Industrial Farm.⁴¹

The Arrival of Mixed-Race Babies

The question of the “brown babies” was raised at the 5th Pan African Congress, held in Manchester in October 1945. The 5th Congress, one of seven held between 1919 and 1994, was attended by over ninety delegates, many from Africa and the West Indies, including men who were later to become leading figures in the anti-colonialism movement, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and Hastings Banda (all three living in England at the time). To some, the Congress marked a turning point in Pan-Africanism. Nkrumah later commented: “it brought about the awakening of African political consciousness.”⁴² W.E.B. Du Bois, who had founded the Congress in 1919, travelled over from the U.S.; Amy Garvey, journalist and widow of Marcus Garvey, from Jamaica. The seven-day Manchester Congress was organized by Trinidadian socialist George Padmore who had been living in London since 1934.⁴³ Despite the key themes of the Congress relating to political action in Africa, there were three recorded references to mixed-race babies, all on the Congress’s first day, which focused on the

⁴¹ Smith, When Jim Crow Met John Bull, 206.

⁴² Quoted in Susan Williams, Colour Bar: The Triumph of Seretse Khama and his Nation (London: Allen Lane, 2006): 13.

⁴³ See Leslie James, George Padmore and Decolonization from Below (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) chapter 3.

“colour problem in Britain.” The fact that the babies were mentioned at all demonstrates how seriously the issue was considered to be by certain black organizations at the time. Eddie DuPlan, from the Gold Coast but working for the Negro Welfare Centre (based in Liverpool), referred to “illegitimate coloured children who had been born to white women...a large problem, in which the Government was taking no hand to provide shelter or assistance for the mothers or children.” Later in the day, Miss Alma La Badie of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Jamaica, returned to this theme, claiming that “the children left behind by coloured American troops” were “one of the most vital problems that the Congress is asked to consider.”⁴⁴ They were “orphans of the storm.”⁴⁵ C.D. Hyde, also of the Negro Welfare Centre, mentioned an organization in Liverpool which was helping these children and he knew of “people in America who are willing to lend a hand.”⁴⁶ I will return later to both the “organization in Liverpool” and these “people in America who are willing to lend a hand.”

W.E.B. Du Bois went back to the U.S. after the Congress “filled with a strange pity for a thousand babies whom I left there facing distress.”⁴⁷ In December 1945 Jamaican doctor Harold Moody, the President of The League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), a civil rights organization he had founded in Britain in 1931 to help combat and eliminate the “colour bar,” wrote to the Minister of Health, Nye Bevan, suggesting that

⁴⁴ Quoted in Hakim Ali and Marika Sherwood, The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited (London: New Beacon Books, 1995): 75-76, 78.

⁴⁵ Quoted in W.E.B. DuBois, “Winds of Change: Negro Babies in England,” The Chicago Defender 15 June 1946.

⁴⁶ Ali and Sherwood, The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited, 78

⁴⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, “Winds of Change”: 15

Britain and the U.S. must treat each baby as a “war casualty.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere he noted: “when what public opinion regards as the ‘taint’ of illegitimacy is added to the disadvantage of mixed race, the chances of these children having a fair opportunity for development and service are much reduced.”⁴⁹ But the U.S. refused to give any financial support, despite being willing to pay huge compensation for other war casualties, including to farmers for damage to crops and for sheep that had miscarried. As for any help from the British State, at the time there was no country-wide policy for dealing with unwanted children, for this was prior to the Children's Act of 1948, which placed the duty of caring for homeless children and those in need on local authorities. Nye Bevan’s only policy was the encouragement of mothers to keep their children, yet his Ministry offered no financial aid.⁵⁰

The “Half-Caste” Discourse

⁴⁸ Harold Moody to Aneurin Bevan, n.d. [December 1945] appendix 4 of Sylvia McNeill, Illegitimate Children Born in Britain of English Mothers and Coloured Americans: Report of a Survey (London: League of Coloured Peoples, 1946): 11-13, MH55/1656, National Archives, Kew. On Moody see David Killingray, “‘To do something for the race’: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples,” in West Indian Intellectuals in Britain, (ed) Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): 51-70

⁴⁹ Harold Moody, “Anglo-American Coloured Children”, The World’s Children March 1946: 44.

⁵⁰ See D.E. Sharp (for the Home Office) to Harold Moody, 24 January 1946, appendix 5 of McNeill, Illegitimate Children: 14.

In Britain the children born to British women and African Americans were usually referred to as “half-caste”, a term with obvious negative connotations. (In Germany the equivalent term was Mischling – meaning mixed or hybrid – which had previously been applied to those who were part-Jewish but in the post war was used to refer to children born to German woman and African-American GIs.)⁵¹ In 1937 a polemic entitled Half-Caste by self-defined Eurasian Cedric Dover, while heralding “the richness of hybrid potentiality,” also indicated the extent of prejudice facing those of mixed race: “The ‘half-caste’ appears in a prodigal literature. It presents him...mostly as an undersized, scheming and entirely degenerate bastard. His father is a blackguard, his mother a whore...But more than all this, he is a potential menace to Western Civilisation, to everything that is White and Sacred.”⁵² The existence of “half-castes” created an ontological problem: could mixed-race offspring be seen as British? They represented a challenge to national and racial boundaries and to the neat polarity between the white British and the non-white colonized racial “other.” As Sonya Rose suggests, their presence blurred “the racial lineaments of British national identity.”⁵³ In 1927 the Liverpool University Settlement (a philanthropic organization focused on helping the poor) had formed the “Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children.” When in 1938 the official history of the Liverpool University Settlement declared that “mixed parentage” was “a handicap comparable to physical deformity,” the authors

⁵¹ Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler , 74-106.

⁵² Cedric Dover, Half-Caste, (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd, 1937): 13.

⁵³ Rose, “Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain”: 155

were reiterating what had become a commonsense understanding.⁵⁴ Moody, who married a white British woman, was told by acquaintances and even strangers that his children would be social degenerates.⁵⁵ To Moody's organization the League of Coloured Peoples, the answer to the racial discrimination facing mixed-race children was education of "the British people in the matter of race."⁵⁶

Such an "education" does not seem to have been widespread. It is interesting to note the attitude of Nella Last, a generally fairly liberal lower-middle-class woman who kept a lively diary for the organization Mass-Observation from the 2nd World War up until her death in 1968. (Mass-Observation was a British social research organization set up in 1937 to record everyday life through volunteers' diaries and questionnaires.) In January 1950 she registered her shock on reading "how many half-caste children were the result of the American negro soldiers' short stay in England"; later that year she noted: "the sight of half-caste children seems to strike at something way deep down

⁵⁴Constance King and Harold King, Two Nations: the Life and Work of the Liverpool University Settlement, (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1938): 132. And see Lucy Bland, "British Eugenics and 'Race Crossing:' a Study of an Interwar Investigation," in Special Issue on "Eugenics Old and New," New Formations no. 60, 2007: 66-78

⁵⁵ Killingray, "'To do something for the race": 59

⁵⁶ P. Cecil Lewis, "Cardiff Report," Keys, vol 3, no.2, Oct-Dec 1935: 61. In the war the LCP produced a pamphlet, Race Relations and the School, which advocated radical changes in school curriculum. Killingray, "'To do something for the race": 64.

in me. I say I've no colour bar, but wonder if really I have a very deep-rooted one."⁵⁷ She is aware of her racism but appears uncomfortable with that recognition. As for whether there was a "colour bar" in the country, famous Trinidadian cricketer Learie Constantine, who lived in Britain from 1929 to 1949, certainly experienced it first-hand. And when in 1949 the popular magazine Picture Post published an article entitled "Is there a British Colour Bar?" it concluded that it was very real, with prejudice "almost always based on ignorance."⁵⁸ The British were hypocritical: they disparaged the racism of the white Americans, rooted in the history of slavery, but were themselves steeped in prejudices against non-white peoples inextricably tied to British imperialism.⁵⁹ British obsession with social class also contributed to the middle and upper classes viewing blacks as inferior, for black people were generally assumed to be of low social status.⁶⁰

In Britain the children born to British women and African Americans were referred to as "half-caste," but the African-American press, as mentioned, gave them the descriptive name "brown babies." How many "brown babies" were there? African-

⁵⁷ Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds), Nella Last in the 1950s (London: Profile Books, 2010): 88, 86. Emphasis in the original. Thanks to Lucy Delap for drawing my attention to these remarks.

⁵⁸ Learie Constantine, Colour Bar (London: Stanley Paul and Co. Ltd, 1954); Robert Kee, "Is there is British Colour Bar?" Picture Post, vol. 4, no. 1, 2 July 1949: 23-28.

⁵⁹ See Wendy Webster, Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Kathleen Paul, Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁶⁰ Lee, "A Forgotten Legacy of the Second World War": 162.

American anthropologist John St Clair Drake came to Britain in 1947 to do fieldwork for his PhD on British race relations, accompanied by his (white) wife, sociologist Elizabeth Johns.⁶¹ In Cardiff Johns informed a white woman with black children, Mrs M, that her husband “was here studying the children of coloured American soldiers.” She [Mrs M] said “hmm. They don’t need any study for that. American troops? They left plenty. There’s thousands of them right here.”⁶² In January 1946 the LCP published a pamphlet Illegitimate Children born in Britain of English Mothers and Coloured Americans by Jamaican teacher Sylvia McNeill which addressed this question of numbers.⁶³ By 1948 letters sent by the LCP to welfare organizations of each county in England and Wales uncovered 775 such children.⁶⁴ The LCP recognized however that many babies would not have fallen within the remit of a welfare agency. If we look comparatively at the German experience, we can conjecture that it was probable that well over half of the British “brown babies” were kept by their birth families, and were

⁶¹ For background on St Clair Drake see Kevin Gaines, “Scholar-Activist St Clair Drake and the Transatlantic World of Black Radicalism,” in The Other Special Relationship: race, rights and riots in Britain and the United States eds. Robin D.G. Kelly and Stephen Tuck (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2015).

⁶² John St Clair Drake, “Values Systems, Social Structure and Race Relations in the British Isles,” (Chicago: unpublished PhD, University of Chicago, 1954): 263.

⁶³ McNeill, Illegitimate Children.

⁶⁴ John St Clair Drake, “The Brown Baby Problem”, Box 60/15, (n.d., approx. 1948), St Clair Drake Archives, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

thus unlikely to have been registered by welfare officials.⁶⁵ However unlike in Germany no centralized demographic statistics were recorded, so it is impossible to know exactly how many “brown babies” were born. In 1947 George Padmore estimated 1,700.⁶⁶ In 1949, Dr Malcolm Joseph-Mitchell, who was “General and Travelling Secretary” of the LCP, estimated the number of children of white women and “coloured serviceman” to be approximately two thousand, although he might have been including children with West Indian fathers.⁶⁷ In contrast to this uncertainty in Britain, in Germany the numbers of biracial occupation children were tracked in censuses in 1950, 1951 and 1954. Demonstrating continued concern about racial mixing, these children were also subjected to anthropological studies. As Heide Fehrenbach points out, such scrutiny would have been inconceivable if conducted on Jews after 1945.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ In Germany 76% of “brown babies” were kept by their birth mothers or other relatives. Lemke Muniz de Faria, “Germany’s “Brown Babies” must be Helped! Will you?,” 344.

⁶⁶ George Padmore “British League Flays Rumor; finds only 1,700 Tan GI Babies,” Chicago Defender, 17 May 1947: 2

⁶⁷ Malcolm Joseph-Mitchell “The Colour Problem among Juveniles”, talk to Kathleen Tacchi-Morris’s International School in Somerset on 9 October 1949, DDTCM/15/14: 3-4, Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton. In November 1946 Afro-American (a Baltimore paper) had also estimated two thousand children, Marika Sherwood, Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission (London: The Savannah Press, 1994): 51.

⁶⁸ Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler: 76

Difficulties and Choices Facing Mothers of “Brown Babies”

How did these British “brown babies” fare in their early years? There has not been a great deal written about their childhood experiences.⁶⁹ In an attempt to discover more about these children I have interviewed thirty-eight of their number. Of the thirty-eight, exactly half were kept by their mothers and/or grandmothers. I have also read or heard narratives of greater or lesser length in relation to another twenty-seven. The “brown babies” were born all over Britain but were largely located in areas where most black GIs were stationed, namely South and South West England, South Wales, East Anglia and Lancashire. Being brought up in predominantly white locations (the exceptions being where troops were sited close to Cardiff and Liverpool, with their black and mixed-race communities) many of the children suffered racism, an acute sense of difference and a lack of racial and familial “belonging.”⁷⁰ Their mothers were also often treated badly, although given the passing of time, the children cannot always remember or possibly never knew about their mothers’ experiences. However several mention the hostility and stigma their mothers faced, with several of my interviewees telling of how their mothers were taunted with epithets like “nigger lover.” Monica’s mother, a single woman who was caring for her own child along with all her younger siblings after her own mother’s death, was once slapped by a woman in the street and barely left the

⁶⁹ One exception is Baker, “‘Lest We Forget’: The Children We Left Behind” which examines the early childhood of eleven such children.

⁷⁰ Much greater detail about these mixed-race GI children will be given in my forthcoming book: Britain’s “Brown Babies”: Children of Black GIs and White Women born in World War 11.

house. Monica reflects: “it was a bit of a scandal, having a mixed race child.”⁷¹ Karen’s mother, also single, was disowned by many of her family, including her parents and sister, who crossed the road when they saw her coming.⁷² Henry remembers his mother being spat at for having a black child.⁷³

A mother of a “brown baby” who tried to keep the child faced not only stigma and prejudice but also problems with accommodation, employment, childcare and lack of financial aid. The unfortunate fact that “landladies definitely discriminate against coloured families” was noted in December 1944 at a conference on “the position of the illegitimate child whose father is alleged to be a coloured American,” jointly organized by the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child and the Church of England Moral Welfare Council.⁷⁴ Similarly the 1949 Picture Post report “Is there a British Colour Bar?” quoted a “typical” landlady: “I wouldn’t mind for myself [having ‘coloured’ lodgers]. But there is no telling what the other lodgers might say.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Interview with Monica, 1 September 2014; Interview with Carole, 9 September 2014.

⁷² Interview with Karen, 1 September 2014.

⁷³ Baker, “Lest We Forget”: 79

⁷⁴ “Report of Conference on the position of the illegitimate child whose father is alleged to be a coloured American,” MH55/1656, TNA. Joseph-Mitchell of the LCP concurred: an unmarried mother with a mixed-race baby found “landladies were not willing to give her accommodation.” Joseph-Mitchell “The Colour Problem among Juveniles.”

⁷⁵ Robert Kee, “Is there is British Colour Bar?” Picture Post, vol. 4, no. 1, 2 July 1949, 25.

Employment for a mother with a mixed-race baby could also be hard to find,⁷⁶ and even if she found work, her life there might be made unbearable. One example, given in a report on LCP correspondence, noted: “The news that Queenie has a coloured child has spread, and the girl is constantly taunted, and has on occasion had to leave her employment because of the unpleasant remarks that have been spoken and because of writing on cloakroom walls.”⁷⁷ However at the 1944 conference a social worker mentioned that in a few successful cases the mother had become a domestic servant “where the employer wanted to help a girl to make a good home for her baby.”⁷⁸ Heather’s mother, who was single, was in service and managed to find people who were prepared to let her bring Heather along: “wherever she went, I went.”⁷⁹ Lack of nurseries or child minders prepared to take “coloured” children was another obstacle. During the war it was possible for some to get babies into residential nurseries run under the government evacuation scheme, providing mothers accepted essential war work and paid ten shillings and six pence a week, approximately a third of their weekly wages. But this was only a temporary measure as the nurseries generally closed at the end of the war.⁸⁰

Given these desperate circumstances, some women understandably wanted to bring paternity claims against the fathers of their children. In February 1947 Davenport

⁷⁶ See Malcolm Joseph-Mitchell “The Colour Problem among Juveniles.”

⁷⁷ “Black Babies – Research Notes,” St Clair Drake, Box 63/5

⁷⁸ “Report of Conference on the position of the illegitimate child whose father is alleged to be a coloured American”

⁷⁹ Interview with Heather, 1 September 2016.

⁸⁰ See Ferguson and Fitzgerald History of the Second World War: 124, 131.

wrote of what happened during the war when a black GI mentioned pregnancy: “The man was usually transferred to some other county or to a distant part of Britain...When a girl tried to follow up her claim against the father of her child, the Army would invariably find ‘no evidence of ever having such a man on the records’.”⁸¹ As historian Brenda Gayle Plummer suggests: “U.S. military authorities had considerable difficulty in recognizing the capacity and right of the African-American men under their control to father.” To the American authorities: “responsible fatherhood...indicated civic entitlement and respectability...the distinction between fathering, as a free man would, and siring, as done by a slave or an animal.”⁸² They could not or would not see the black soldiers as truly “free men,” and as with slaves, they denied legitimate black paternity.

Mothers with Potential or Actual Husbands

The LCP received a number of letters from unmarried mothers who had the possibility of marriage to (white) boyfriends if they could give up their mixed-race children.⁸³ One of my interviewees, Adrian, lived with his mother for four years in Plymouth then was taken to a children’s home in Liverpool (the African Churches Mission). When she

⁸¹ Davenport, “U.S. Prejudice dooms 1,000 British Babies.”

⁸² Brenda Gayle Plummer, “Brown Babies: Race, Gender and Policy after World War 11” in Window on Freedom: race, civil rights, and foreign affairs, 1945-1988, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 85.

⁸³ “Black Babies – Research Notes,” St Clair Drake, Box 63/5.

dropped him off, his mother came with her husband, who she had so presumably chosen over her four-year-old child. Adrian can only remember “a stocky fellow with a limp.”⁸⁴ In contrast, the mother of Heather, who married when Heather was three or four, had no intention of giving up her daughter and Heather assumed her step-father was her actual father until told otherwise by an uncle when aged thirteen.⁸⁵ Sylvia McNeill has estimated that from a third to nearly a half of the babies’ mothers were already married to British men when they got pregnant,⁸⁶ and some of these women gave up their children in order to be reconciled with their husbands. At the 1944 Conference many of the delegates (who were largely social workers and moral reform workers) were keen to keep marriages together where at all possible.⁸⁷ If the illegitimate child was the result

⁸⁴ Interview with Adrian, 1 September 2014.

⁸⁵ Interview with Heather, 1 September 2016.

⁸⁶ See for example McNeill Illegitimate Children: 9, which found nearly as many married mothers as unmarried mothers with “brown babies,” although arguably this study over-represented married women, as they were more likely to want to give up their children. However a study on illegitimacy in Birmingham for 1944-45 found that over a third of the mothers of illegitimate children were married, while in Southsea the figure was just under half. Ferguson and Fitzgerald History of the Second World War: 98. Over a third of my thirty-eight interviewees’ mothers were married.

⁸⁷ At the 1945 Pan African Congress, Alma La Badie also reflected on this problem: “many of these babies were born to married women whose husbands were serving overseas. Now that the husbands were returning the condition of forgiveness was that the children be sent elsewhere.” Quoted in Ali and Sherwood, The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited: 78.

of a relationship with a white GI, it was presumably possible to pass it off as the husband's, so long as the dates roughly matched. But this was clearly not feasible in the case of a mixed-race baby. That this problem was common knowledge was underlined by the author of an article in the NAACP's newspaper The Crisis: "British men (whether husbands or prospective husbands) would usually be reluctant to accept a child when its illegitimacy could not be hidden."⁸⁸ Implied here is that a husband forgiving his wife an indiscretion was one thing (and he may well have committed adultery himself when away at war), but accepting a child that was obviously not his biologically was a step too far. The mother of one of my interviewees was married and her husband initially thought Babs was his, because she had a fair complexion, but after about six months she darkened. She was sent to a Dr Barnardo's Home, one of the many homes of this British charity set up in the 1860s for the care of children.⁸⁹

There were however cases where the mother was married but the husband accepted the illegitimate child into the family. One Oxford woman told historian Norman Longmate that during the war she knew of a "none too bright" husband who took his wife's "dusky baby" as his when assured that it was "the result of having been startled by a black soldier when out walking one night during her pregnancy."⁹⁰ (This theory of "imprinting" was popular in the early modern period but was generally no

⁸⁸ The Crisis November 1951: 583.

⁸⁹ Interview with Babs, 3 June 2014. On Dr Barnardo's see June Rose, Inside Barnardo's: 120 years of Caring for Children (London: Futura, 1987).

⁹⁰ Longmate, The GIs: the Americans in Britain: 286.

longer believed by the nineteenth, let alone the twentieth century.)⁹¹ In Janet's case, her mother's husband agreed to raise her as his own. Her mother, who was very blond, as were her other children, told Janet that her darker skin and hair was due to her father's Celtic inheritance. When Janet was twelve her mother died and her grandmother told her the truth about her black GI father.⁹² Similarly, Michael's mother was married to a man who accepted Michael because he did not want to break up the family; they already had four children. All his childhood Michael thought he was adopted. One day he confronted his mother who asserted: "you are my son and you look just like your father," meaning his birth father.⁹³ Terry's mother was already married and had five children, when she had twins with a black GI. When her husband came home from the war "he saw us, Susan and I," Terry reflects, "I can't tell you what he was like because I was too young. But nevertheless, he grew up not hating Susan and I, [but] he never held hands, he never cuddled us." Terry called his step-father "Dad" and thought he was his father until he was about 8 or 9 and told otherwise, but his step-father was always very distant and treated the twins differently from his biological children.⁹⁴ Carole's mother was also already married and Carole also called her step-father (who had ginger hair) "Dad." When Carole was aged five or six he made her mother tell her about her biological father. She thought: "oh good, I'm a bit different, I've got an

⁹¹ See Laura Gowing, Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Seventeenth-Century England (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 111-148.

⁹² "GI Babies", Daily Express, 2 October 1999; interview with Janet, 29 November 2016.

⁹³ Telephone interview with Janine, Michael's daughter, 8 November 2016.

⁹⁴ Interview with Terry, 14 December 2016.

American dad.” But when her mother and step-father argued, Carole’s birth was often a point of contention: “I stuck out like a sore thumb, I was just a reminder I suppose of what mum had done.”⁹⁵

The Option of Fostering or Adoption

If a mother could not keep her child, the usual option was giving her/him up for adoption. But it is likely that the majority spent their childhood and early adolescence in children's homes or in foster care, and only a small number were adopted.⁹⁶ As Somerset Superintendent Health Visitor Celia Bangham argued in 1945, adoption societies were loath to take on a so-called “half-caste” child because “on account of its colour, there was no possibility of getting such a child adopted.”⁹⁷ The belief that it would be difficult to place black or mixed-race children for adoption was widespread. As Deborah Cohen has suggested, this belief related not simply to racist attitudes, but also arose from the common desire of adopting couples to adopt a child who could pass as their biological child.⁹⁸ Such a view was held by Dr Barnardo’s, the main provider of children’s homes in this period. In the Spring 1946 issue of its magazine Night and Day it explained that “would-be adopters generally ask...for a little girl of tender years, good-looking, with fair, curly hair and blue eyes; healthy...preferably legitimate...and

⁹⁵ Interview with Carole, 9 September 2014.

⁹⁶ Smith, When Jim Crow met John Bull, 210.

⁹⁷ Celia Bangham, Somerset Superintendent Health Visitor, discussing the abandoned “half-caste” child: 13 December 1945, FO 371/51617, AN3/3/45, TNA.

⁹⁸ See Deborah Cohen, Family Secrets (London: Viking, 2013) 113-142.

free of...hereditary taint.” Yet Dr Barnardo’s took in a child “irrespective of its physical or mental condition...it may be backward mentally, of dusky skin, of homely appearance.”⁹⁹ Over a third of the children under their care were placed in foster families, although this was often a temporary arrangement, and the home took these children back if necessary. Tony M was in a Dr Barnardo’s home in Essex and aged five was fostered by a (white) couple in a village in Cambridgeshire, who had already fostered twelve children from Dr Barnardo’s. He was never adopted but stayed very happily with this big family throughout his childhood: ‘I just went for a holiday and it went on for 15 years.’¹⁰⁰ Babs was not so fortunate: She was taken away from her foster family, also in East Anglia, when a Barnardo’s worker made a spot visit and found that Babs, aged ten, had been left home alone. She was returned to the children’s home.¹⁰¹

Of my thirty-eight interviewees three were adopted by non-relatives (and several were adopted by their grandparents). Ann, who was given up by her married mother to Somerset Social Services and placed in Holnicote House nursery near Yeovil in Somerset, was happily fostered by a couple in South Wales when she was five. A few years later the couple adopted her. Although Ann was subjected to racism from some of the local adults (for example, “this elderly lady said to me ... ‘You niggers are all the same’”) she “couldn’t have asked for better parents,” and her four much older brothers were also lovely. Ann only experienced racism in her family when she married a miner at eighteen: “we went to live with his parents ... Well, his mother didn’t like

⁹⁹ “Should they be adopted?” Night and Day: the Barnardo’s Magazine, Spring 1946: 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Tony M, 2 June 2014.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Babs, 3 June 2014.

me because I was the wrong colour... She said: 'Well, you should marry people of your own race and colour'... she said that she didn't want no niggers as grandchildren... When I told her I was pregnant [she said]: 'I hope you die, and the baby.' And when I had the baby, the baby was stillborn. And I said, 'Well she's had her wish. Only thing is, I'm still here.'" Ann went on to have four other children and her mother-in-law was kind towards them but never accepted Ann.¹⁰² Another former resident of Holnicote House, Deborah, was adopted by Queenie and Sid, who lived in Essex. Queenie was herself mixed-race: her father was a black merchant seaman. "But the sad thing about Queenie - she absolutely hated being black," Deborah told me. "She hated her colour... She was ashamed of it...which was very sad, actually, because it made me ashamed of it for a while....I had the advantage of being brought up in a family I looked as if I could have belonged to, whereas a lot didn't...they did their best, but ... I didn't get a sense of love."¹⁰³

Like Ann, Tony H (a different Tony from Tony M) had a very happy and successful adoption. Until aged seven he was in children's homes in Bury, Lancashire and Newcastle. (Ironically Preston Children's Department moved him from Bury to Newcastle because he minded being the only non-white child, but the Newcastle home was also exclusively white). In October 1951, when Tony H was six (he was born in January 1945), his mother wrote to the Newcastle home that she "longed to keep him and work for him, but it was so difficult...I have been thinking if he could be adopted

¹⁰² Interview with Ann, 28 November 2016.

¹⁰³ Interview with Deborah, 17 October 2016.

it would be better for himself.”¹⁰⁴ Preston Children’s Department approached the League of Coloured Peoples for help in finding an adoptive family. The reply was discouraging:

Unfortunately, the coloured people in Great Britain, with few exceptions, fall into two groups: the students, who are young and unmarried, and who will return to their homes in the colonies from which they come, when they have completed their studies, and the manual workers or artisan class, who are living with their wives and families, who are not, as a rule, in a position to feed another child. The bulk of the coloured middle class remain... in their own colony. Thus, you see, the difficulty in getting the little boy adopted by those of his own colour. As regards adoption by white people, this does happen from time to time and from all that we hear it has been successful to date, but here again the call is for orphan girl babies and not for boys, as any adoption society can tell you.¹⁰⁵

Despite this gloomy forecast, in December 1952 a potential adoptive couple were found for Tony H. Eugene has come over from Jamaica during the war to join the RAF and had stayed; Iva had come over with their small son Bobby on the Windrush Empire ship in June 1948 to join him, and they were living in Nelson, Lancashire. Once the cricketer Constantine Learie had left in 1949, they were the town’s only black family.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Tony’s mother to Matron, Lady Stephenson House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 26 October 1951, in Tony H’s possession.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in letter from Preston Children’s Department to Principal of National Children’s Home and Orphanage, Highbury Park, N5, 14 November 1952, in Tony H’s possession.

¹⁰⁶ Constantine, Colour Bar.

The couple, who already had a son a year older than Tony but wanted another child, were strict but very loving; when they applied to adopt Tony in March 1959 (having fostered him for the past six years), they gave the reason that “they love the lad and want to do what is best for him.”¹⁰⁷ Tony H defines himself as African-Caribbean, not African-American, because of his strong identification with his Jamaican family.¹⁰⁸

Preston Children’s Department was not the only organization to write to the LCP to ask for help in finding adoptive and foster families, and they received many letters from mothers of mixed-race children. One from a Miss K, Sevenoaks, Kent, dated November 1946 read: “I wonder if you could be kind enough to help me. I have a little coloured boy aged one year and eight months...I have to earn my living so cannot keep him myself. This is a village where hardly anyone has seen a coloured person...I should like to get him a family of coloured people then he will not feel ‘one on his own’ so much.” She had had no luck in finding someone to foster him: “foster mothers will not take him on account of his colour.”¹⁰⁹ Working in collaboration with the LCP, an article entitled “Colour-Barred Babies” appeared in the Daily Mirror in July 1947. It opened by declaring: “There are 750 happy, healthy boy and girl babies in Britain that nobody wants. They are the children born during the war years to married and unmarried British women and American Negro soldiers.” The article ended with the

¹⁰⁷ Report of County Borough of Burnley Children’s Department: Enquiries concerning Applicants 16 March 1959, in Tony H’s possession.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Tony H, 19 October 2016.

¹⁰⁹ “Correspondents and Documents,” St Clair Drake, Box 64/3; The 1944 Conference also reported that “no foster families would take a colored child.” Report of Conference on the Position of the Illegitimate Child.

rousing question: “Won’t YOU take a coloured kiddie into your home?”¹¹⁰ For many the answer was “yes” as letters (over a hundred) began to “stream” into the LCP office. A year later the LCP had arranged three cases of fostering and thirteen successful adoptions, with a further two under way.¹¹¹

The LCP’s efforts to find adoptive families for the babies could be very frustrating however, as St Clair Drake reported: “there is a tendency on the part of many English people concerned with child welfare to oppose the care of colored children by non-colored families. The Committee has one case now pending where after months of tedious negotiations with a very fine middle-class family, the county authorities who had the child in a nursery, refused to allow it to go to a white family.”¹¹² Clearly, what was labeled “the same race policy” in the 1980s (the policy that a child should only be adopted by a couple of the child’s ethnicity) was already in operation in the 1940s. An example of a potential adoption being blocked on race grounds involved Rosa, who on reading her files in the 1990s discovered that an attempt by two single unmarried sisters to adopt her aged twelve from a Catholic children’s home was vetoed by a social worker who condemned their motives as “sickly sentimentality.” Rosa was unhappy at the home and these two women had been taking her for enjoyable day-outings; she never saw them again.¹¹³ Cases such as these explain why even though some of the “brown

¹¹⁰ Ronald Bedford, “Coloured-Barred Babies,” Daily Mirror, 22 July 1947, 2. Ronald Bedford went on to become one of the paper’s leading journalists in the area of science and medicine.

¹¹¹ St Clair Drake, “The League’s Sociological Approach.”

¹¹² St Clair Drake, “The League’s Sociological Approach.”

¹¹³ Baker, ““Lest We Forget””: 74.

babies” were eventually adopted, the vast majority of those relinquished by their mothers spent at least some time in a children’s home.

The African Churches Mission

In a postscript to her letter to the LCP in November 1946 Miss K wrote: “if you know of a Home that will take dark children could you let me know?”¹¹⁴ The question of whether homes should be set up primarily for “dark” children or should be racially mixed was a point of contention. At the December 1944 conference one correspondent had suggested it might be better to place mixed-race children in children’s homes “where the majority was not white.” John Carter of the LCP reported that Learie Constantine had been playing cricket to raise funds for a home in Wakefield but he did not want it to be just for “coloured” children as he and the LCP were against segregation.¹¹⁵ Other conference delegates tended to agree with this anti-segregation position.

There was one home in Liverpool, the African Churches Mission, that did prioritize the housing of mixed-race children of black GIs; it was headed by a remarkable Nigerian, Pastor Daniels Ekarte (known as “the African Saint”).¹¹⁶ This home was the “organization in Liverpool” referred to by C.D. Hyde at the 5th Pan-African Congress in 1945. Ekarte was described by St Clair Drake as “a dignified,

¹¹⁴ “Correspondents and Documents,” St Clair Drake, Box 64/3.

¹¹⁵ “Report of Conference on the position of the illegitimate child whose father is alleged to be a coloured American.”

¹¹⁶ See Sherwood, Pastor Daniels Ekarte.

kindly, dark brown man who wears a full beard.” He had set up his Mission in 1931, originally to work with black seaman and other black people in the city. He explained to St Clair Drake that during the war he had felt a calling “to rescue the Negro babies” and to “make peace between husband and wife” (a concern with maintaining marriages that found similar expression at the December 1944 conference). On occasion he would express a desire to “gather together all the babies, train them in industrial education and then send them forth at adolescence to help redeem his beloved Africa.”¹¹⁷ At other times he would say he wanted to “establish in this country a coloured population such as exists in America.”¹¹⁸ Ekarte had been converted by Scottish missionary Mary Slessor in Nigeria (he referred to himself as “Mary Slessor’s Boy”) and a missionary zeal informed his work.¹¹⁹ Slessor had rescued twins in Nigeria, a country where twins were thought to be a curse and were thus often abandoned and left to die.¹²⁰ Ekarte was in effect continuing the work of saving babies.

The African Churches Mission was not big enough to take more than a few children. Ekarte said he could take up to twelve but it seems that there were never more

¹¹⁷ St Clair Drake, “The Brown Baby Problem.”

¹¹⁸ Report to R Whiteway, Woman Inspector, 7 May 1946, quoted in John Belshem Before the Windrush: race relations in 20th century Liverpool (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014): 124.

¹¹⁹ See G.D. Ekarte, “The 1945 Letter for Constructive and Building Programme of the ‘Booker-T-Washington Children’s Home’,” Br. Emp. Mss.S23, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

¹²⁰ See W.P. Livingstone, Mary Slessor of Calabar; Pioneer Missionary (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1927): 13.

than eight or nine at any one time. In 1949, the City Council ordered the Mission home closed on health grounds. Brian, a child at the Mission, remembers how much of the area of Toxteth in Liverpool had been bomb damaged: “you would have to have moved every child in Toxteth because it was so bad, the whole area was a bomb site.” There had been spot checks on the Mission and while the children had been found to be happy, healthy and well-fed, the house was condemned as unsuitable. Home Office inspectors in February 1949 found broken windows, insufficient chairs for the children; Jim, who was also a child at the Mission, remembers “there were holes through the ceiling.” On May 31st 1949 the Home Office issued a twenty-eight day notice of closure. The following day Ekarte appealed: he pointed out that neither he nor the children’s mothers had ever received any money from the government or from charities. As for the state of the building, “many homes around here are in a similar condition,” he wrote.¹²¹ But on June 3rd, eleven days before the period to appeal had expired, local officials and the police pounced. Brian, aged five at the time, recounts the story: “They came at about seven o’clock in the morning and I remember it as though it was yesterday... We gave them the run-around you know. They’d locked Pastor Daniels in his office... and they had to bring in reinforcements to get us because they just couldn’t catch us... I remember biting one official.”¹²² Jim recalls “several black Maria [police vans] and actually we were sort of screaming and shouting... we were kicking.”¹²³ The Sunday Pictorial wrote a heart-rending feature entitled “‘Black Saint’ fights for his children” describing the

¹²¹ Quoted in Sherwood, Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission: 67.

¹²² Interview with Brian, 24 March 2014.

¹²³ Interview with Jim, 16 August 2014.

incident and Ekarte's grief: his "tears trickling down his ebony checks."¹²⁴ Brian thinks the closure of the home was political: "Mr Ekarte would always champion the likes of the black seaman and so on to the council and he made himself a nuisance and I think this was their way of getting back at him."¹²⁵

The children were eventually forcibly removed; they loved kind Pastor Daniels, they had never known another father-figure, they had no desire to leave what for most of them was the only home they knew. Brian had been taken to the Mission aged three months; his mother had had him at sixteen. She was living at home with her mother in a two-bedroom house; her mother already had two children and was expecting a third. Jim had also been given up as a small baby. His mother and his aunt Joan, who had learning difficulties, had had babies at almost the same time (nine days apart); his mother took her sister's baby (who was white) as her own child and Jim was taken to the Mission. Most of the children removed from the Mission ended up at Fazakerley Cottage Homes, also in Liverpool, a compound of over twenty detached villas for about 700 children. Although these facilities were of a higher quality than at the Mission, the atmosphere at the Cottage Homes lacked the warmth and love of Pastor Ekarte and his house-keeper Mrs Roberts.

Holnicote House and the Search for Adoptive Families in the U.S.

¹²⁴ "Black Saint Fights for his Children," Sunday Pictorial 12 June 1949, 2.

¹²⁵ Interview with Brian. And see Sherwood, Pastor Daniels Ekarte, 32-50 and Belshem Before the Windrush, chapters 2 and 3 which substantiates this claim.

Holnicote House, a beautiful National Trust building in Somerset, was requisitioned in 1943 by Somerset County Council, initially for use as a nursery for children evacuated from cities. However mixed-race GI children were increasingly taken onto the Council's books, often when only two weeks old, and by 1948 Somerset had forty-five such children, of which about half were placed in Holnicote House.¹²⁶ The home was for children up to five years old, after which they were fostered, adopted or sent to other children's homes. All the accounts of living at the Home portray it as a very happy place, with the children looked after by loving young nursery nurses. Deborah relates: 'We were always together. We were always, you know, like a little family... It was lovely... all I felt was - safe.'¹²⁷ The nursery nurses felt very positive about the place too: Barbara C, a nursery nurse there at the time, declared that "I loved it"; Margaret B, another nursery nurse, felt likewise.¹²⁸ Deborah remembers that there were often times when people would visit and look at them all lined up in a row. Deborah reflects: "The

¹²⁶ Somerset County Council minutes of the Children's Committee, 27 July 1948 – 2 Dec 1952, CH1/1: 77, Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton; FO 371/51617, AN3/3/45, TNA. The house had previously been leased to the Holiday Fellowship (an organization similar to the Youth Hostels Association) by the National Trust and after the war the Fellowship was keen to reclaim it. But the County Council could not find other premises for the children, and held onto the property until 1951. Somerset County Council minutes of the Children's Committee, 27 July 1948 – 2 Dec 1952, CH1/1: 16, 385.

¹²⁷ Interview with Deborah, 17 October 2016.

¹²⁸ Telephone conversations with Barbara C, 9 November 2016 and with Margaret B, 21 October 2016.

matron, apparently, had been very instrumental in trying to find families for us. I think she was very genuinely fearful of our future - knowing that once we left there and went to other children's homes, it might not be such a cosseted, safe place.” Leon Y (as distinct from Leon Lomax), one of the mixed-race children in Deborah’s friendship group “always used to come out and say: ‘Oh, have you come to take me to your house? Have you come to be my mummy?’ or ‘Have you come to be my daddy?’” Sadly no family ever adopted Leon.¹²⁹

Given the difficulties of finding homes for the children in Britain, Celia Bangham was keen to arrange their adoption by their putative fathers, near relatives or other “coloured” families in the U.S. On 13 December 1945 the Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede, met with Miss Bangham and Victor Collins, MP for Taunton, to discuss this possibility. Chuter Ede was unenthusiastic: he worried about “the appalling discrimination made in many parts of the U.S. against coloured people.” (In Germany Lois McVey of the U.S. Displaced Persons Commission, likewise pointed out to German officials that mixed-race children, if sent to the U.S., would “suffer considerably due to the antipathy towards colored people.”)¹³⁰ He also explained the legal position on adoption: under British law (the Adoption Act of 1939, which came into effect in 1943), children were only allowed to be sent abroad to live with British subjects or relatives. African-American couples who came forward to adopt were thus excluded from consideration, and since they were only deemed “putative” fathers, the

¹²⁹ Interview with Deborah, 17 October 2016. Although Leon was not one of those chosen for adoption, he had a happy time in the boys’ home he was sent on to: Whitewell Home in Frome. Interview with Leon’s wife Lesley, 25 November 2016.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler: 142.

black GIs were not considered to be relatives. Sending the children to the U.S. would thus have necessitated an Amendment to the Act. The Home Secretary simply announced that he “would consider what could be done constructively to deal with the matter,” thereby putting the issue on hold.¹³¹

The possibility of sending mixed-race GI babies to the U.S. had been raised at the December 1944 conference. Miss Steel of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council thought the suggestion “very cruel...it would add to their sense of being unwanted, not only the sense that their mothers had given them up but the country where they were born.” Mr Wellbank of Dr Barnardo’s agreed: “It is not a good idea that they should be exported. We should get over the colour problem.”¹³² In February 1945 a Sarah Moyse sent a letter to the wife of the U.S. president, Eleanor Roosevelt, suggesting that some of the children could be schooled in the U.S. She approached her husband who abruptly replied: “this is a British problem – not American.”¹³³ Certain British government officials appear to have agreed. After the meeting with Chuter Ede in December 1945 correspondence went back and forth between government officials and in February 1946 it was stated in a memo from the Foreign Office to the British Embassy that the “Home Office is not altogether sure that it is desirable to give a degree of official sanction to the view that there is no place for these coloured children in the

¹³¹ W.M.G . “Coloured Children of English Mothers and Negro Members of the United States Forces,” 14 December 1945, FO371/51617, AN3/3/45, TNA.

¹³² “Report of Conference on the position of the illegitimate child whose father is alleged to be a coloured American.”

¹³³ Quoted in Smith, When Jim Crow met John Bull: 209.

United Kingdom.”¹³⁴ To put this in less pompous words, the Home Office was admitting at least some responsibility for these children.

British officials may have opposed the “brown babies” being sent abroad, but in the U.S. moves were afoot to receive these babies. A group of upper-middle-class black women in Chicago had formed a “Brown Babies Organizing Committee” and had compiled a list of over 500 individuals wishing to adopt¹³⁵ - some of the “people in America who are willing to lend a hand” mentioned at the 5th Pan-African Congress. And in late 1946 Ekarte was getting some excellent publicity: two African-American magazines, Ebony and Liberty, presented sympathetic articles accompanied by photographs. The articles were not about American adoption as such, but they raised awareness of the plight of the children, the article in Ebony explicitly linking the crisis to the limits of British liberalism.¹³⁶ But the U.S. adoption endeavor experienced a massive setback when on 5 April 1947 a highly sensational story in the Daily Mail claimed that “Five thousand dusky ‘problem babies’...left behind by coloured U.S. troops” were going to be shipped to America. The solicitor of the “Negro Welfare Society” (which presumably was the Negro Welfare Centre) was quoted as saying “There are 10,000 illegitimate coloured children in this country...we propose to send half of them to America. We have been promised a liner in nine months’ time.”¹³⁷ The

¹³⁴ North American Department, Foreign Office to British Embassy, Washington, 19 February 1946, FO 371/51617, AN3/3/45.

¹³⁵ St Clair Drake, “The Brown Baby Problem”

¹³⁶ “Fatherless children test racial liberalism of British,” Ebony 19 November 1946;

“Britain’s mulatto ‘GI’ babies,” Liberty, 7 December 1946

¹³⁷ “Britain ‘exports’ 5,000 babies,” Daily Mail 5 April 1947.

U.S. Consul in Liverpool interviewed Ekarte the following month about the exaggerated figures. Ekarte estimated 5,000 illegitimate children altogether, black and white, and could not account for the Daily Mail's claim.¹³⁸ The Home Office denied that any application for a liner had been made, and stated categorically that there were no plans to ship children to the U.S.

The rumor however spread widely through the States and triggered a strong reaction. The issue was addressed in Congress where Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi declared he was "unalterably opposed to bringing to this country a lot of illegitimate half-breed negro children from England...the offspring of the scum of the British Isles."¹³⁹ Certain African Americans also opposed the arrival of these children. Bishop Emory Cain from North Carolina announced: "The intelligent Negroes of America are trying to discourage the mongrel in our race...We lifted ourselves out of slavery in 80 years and are proud of such leaders as Booker T. Washington...We couldn't be proud of these children".¹⁴⁰ W.E.B DuBois had come across a rather different reaction when he had brought the problem of the "brown babies" "before a

¹³⁸ Sherwood, Pastor Daniels Ekarte: 57. Ekarte was greatly underestimating, for it is estimated that there were up to 22,000 babies fathered in Britain by GIs during the war. Smith, When Jim Crow Meets John Bull: 208; Gardiner "Over Here!": 158.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Smith, When Jim Crow met John Bull, 21. Herbert Munroe, head of the information bureau of the State Department's visa division referred to these children as "little black apes" James Hicks, "State Dept. official calls colored British babies 'apes'," Plain Dealer 25 April 1947.

¹⁴⁰ "Negroes will oppose coming of England's brown babies," Plain Dealer 25 April 1947.

group of people, white and colored, intelligent, liberal”: “I sensed among the colored ones a certain feeling of vengeance accomplished upon white womanhood in retaliation for what colored women had suffered.”¹⁴¹ Yet vengeance and hostility towards “mongrelization” were not the only reactions from African Americans; many hoped to help the children. For example, the Chicago Defender announced that on 8 June 1947 “many stars and the public will do their part to help the ‘Brown Babies of Briton’ [sic] with a gala cocktail Sip. [?] at the Club Sudan in Harlem.”¹⁴²

U.S. adoptions

By late 1947 the fantasy of a ship arriving in the U.S. from Britain with 5,000 “brown babies” was still being cited in American magazine articles, and African Americans were still being encouraged to adopt these children. Articles about the children of Holnicote House appeared in widely circulated American magazines: one in late December 1947 in Newsweek, the other the following August in Life.¹⁴³ Such articles coincided with a change in Home Office policy. In a letter from the Home Office’s Children’s Branch to the Foreign Office in November 1947 it was explained that an agreement had been arrived at with the Americans: a child would be permitted to travel

¹⁴¹ DuBois, “Winds of Change.”

¹⁴² “Harlem to Aid British Babies,” Chicago Defender 31 May 1947: 10.

¹⁴³ Britain’s ‘Brown Tiny Tims,’” Newsweek 29 December 1947: 24; “The Babies They Left Behind,” Life 23 August 1948: 41. There had also been a short article, with photographs, in Chicago Defender: “With the Tan-Yank Babies in England,” 9 August 1947.

to its putative father (or the father's relatives) in the U.S., dependent on the arrangements being "in the best interests of the child." The latter would be determined by the International Social Service in the States and the Family Welfare Association in Britain.¹⁴⁴ The following month the Home Office and the Foreign Office agreed that the scheme would come into effect on 1st January 1948.¹⁴⁵ The policy applied to "coloured" children only, announced the Foreign Office, since white children were "an entirely different problem."¹⁴⁶ The nature of this "different problem" was not spelt out, but must have referred both to the greater ease in getting white children adopted in

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Children's Branch, Home Office to Foreign Office, 21 November 1947, FO 371/AN3948/13/45, NA. A week later the Children's Branch wrote again, this time mentioning (but providing no solution to) the possible "embarrassment" that might result from "the apparent inconsistency with earlier policy." Letter from Children's Branch, Home Office to Foreign Office, 29 November 1947, FO 371/AN3949/13/45, NA. The International Social Service, founded in the interwar years to deal with refugees, had become a prominent co-ordinating agency for international adoptions with offices in Europe, U.S., Africa and Japan. Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler: 152

¹⁴⁵ J.E. Jackson, Foreign Office, to B. Lyon, Home Office, 16 December 1947, FO 371/AN3949/13/45, NA. Margaret Kornitzer, press officer for the Standing Conference of Societies Registered for Adoption, later referred to this new policy as an "Anglo-American agreement." Margaret Kornitzer, Child Adoption in the Modern World (London: Putnam, 1952): 244

¹⁴⁶ J.E. Jackson, Foreign Office, to B. Lyon, Home Office, 16 December 1947, FO 371/AN3949/13/45

Britain and to the lesser likelihood that white American fathers would want to adopt their own children, since unlike black GIs they had had the possibility of marrying the child's mother. However the Home Office became worried about this overt exclusion of white children: there was "the need to avoid any suggestion that we in this country are trying to get rid of the coloured waifs left behind by the American occupation."¹⁴⁷ And yet getting "rid of" the "brown babies" appears to be precisely what they were intending.

In January 1948, during parliamentary question time, when asked what arrangements were being made for the illegitimate children of British women to go to the U.S., Chuter Ede announced the government's policy change: "no obstacle should be put in the way of emigration of the children to the U.S. for adoption by relatives, if it is established in a particular case that this would be in the child's interests."¹⁴⁸ He neither mentioned that this countered the Adoption Act, nor clarified whether the children were to be exclusively mixed-race. (Presumably Chuter Ede was consciously trying to avoid implying that they were "trying to get rid of the coloured waifs"). U.S. adoptions appeared at last to be happening: in March Somerset County Council minuted arranging "the transfer of coloured illegitimate children [numbers unspecified]...to

¹⁴⁷ Home Office to Foreign Office, 24 December 1947, FO 371/AN4342/13/45

¹⁴⁸ Parliamentary Debates: Commons (London: Hansard, 1948-49) col 186, 29 January 1948. For the successful "Brown Baby Plan", 1951-54, that enabled African Americans to adopt Afro-German GI babies and was orchestrated by black American Mabel Grammer and by the African-American press, see Lemke Muniz de Faria, 'Germany's "Brown Babies" must be Helped! Will you?': 354-57; Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler: 147-8

America.”¹⁴⁹ And by the end of the year the LCP had liaised with the American Embassy to help secure visas, transport and guardians for seven children travelling out to fathers or relatives in the U.S.¹⁵⁰

Three years later however, according to Margaret Kornitzer, press officer for the Standing Conference of Societies Registered for Adoption, only twenty or thirty such children had emigrated to North America. She explained the low numbers as due to the costliness of the process for the adopting families and its lengthiness, given it was surrounded by checks and balances.¹⁵¹ However she failed to mention the most crucial reason: a further about face in Home Office policy in the intervening period. For in March 1949, after meeting with a deputation from Somerset County Council, the Home Office ruled that thirty-one children under the Council’s care would not now be allowed to emigrate.¹⁵² It refused to amend the Children’s Act of 1948, which had incorporated the regulations about prohibiting adoption overseas by non-relatives. An official statement of explanation was released: “any implication that there is not a place

¹⁴⁹ Somerset County Council “Maternity and Child Welfare,” minute 2194, C/CC/M/2/19, 305, Somerset Heritage Centre

¹⁵⁰ Newsletter of LCP vol XVII, Oct-Dec 1948: DD/TCM/15/14, Somerset Archives.

The LCP had also received 172 letters from “coloured” Americans willing to adopt.

¹⁵¹ Kornitzer, Child Adoption in the Modern World 244-5. Despite the limited numbers, she saw the process as “an excellent example of what can be done at the international level to ensure a good adoption.”

¹⁵² The deputation included five of the six Somerset MPs. Somerset County Council minutes of the Children’s Committee, 110. The Council had been hoping for the emigration of forty-five children, so it is possible that several had been able to travel.

in this country for coloured children who have not a normal life would cause controversy and give offense in some quarters.”¹⁵³

Why did the Home Office shift its position yet again? In its newsletter at the end of 1948, the LCP suggested that the publicity concerning the transporting of five thousand children had “stirred up a storm of controversy in the United States...there is considerable sensitiveness on both sides of the Atlantic about any action that might give the impression of a mass migration of coloured children from Britain to America.”¹⁵⁴ The Home Office had denied the existence of the chartered ship, but it appears that through 1948 it had become increasingly concerned about being seen as shirking responsibility and of dumping the mixed-race children of British subjects onto the Americans.¹⁵⁵ Of significance too was the passing of the British Nationality Act that year. Citizenship was granted to citizens of British colonies and former colonies, giving them the right to come to Britain and stay indefinitely.¹⁵⁶ While the government was clearly ambivalent about the arrival of nearly 500 Jamaicans in June 1948 on the *Empire Windrush*,¹⁵⁷ when debating the British Nationality Act the following month Chuter

¹⁵³ “Ban Adoption by US of Brown War Babies,” Chicago Defender 9 April 1949: 1; this is reproduced with slightly different wording in George Padmore, “Decides Brown Babies must stay in England,” Chicago Defender 23 April 1949.

¹⁵⁴ LCP Newsletter Oct-Dec 1948.

¹⁵⁵ George Padmore claimed that Chuter Ede changed his mind because of pressure from the LCP and another black organization, the Pan-African Federation. Padmore, “Decides Brown Babies must stay in England.”

¹⁵⁶ Peter Fryer, Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain (London: Pluto Press, 1984) 373; Paul, Whitewashing Britain: 9-10, 14-17.

¹⁵⁷ Paul, Whitewashing Britain: 111-130.

Ede pronounced: “we recognize the right of the colonial peoples to be treated as men and brothers with the people of this country.”¹⁵⁸ How could he then effectively deport the “brown babies,” who as the children of British mothers had automatic British nationality?

As already mentioned, Leon Lomax was one of the mixed-race GI babies from Britain who did manage to get to the U.S. When he arrived in January 1949 he was heralded as “the first ‘Brown Baby’ adopted by an American couple to reach America.” (Many readers subsequently sent letters to the Pittsburgh Courier asking if they too could adopt one of these babies;¹⁵⁹ they were presumably largely unsuccessful, given the Home Office’s imminent shift in policy.) Leon’s adoption had been a lengthy process. His father and his father’s wife had first tried to adopt him back in January 1946; neither the British Embassy nor the American State Department replied to the couple’s letters. In June that year they wrote to the American Red Cross and again got no reply; they asked the child’s mother to get the British Welfare Department to help but to no avail. Then in December 1946 or early 1947, reports vary, they read in an American magazine about a Dr Wingate in Britain, who as a minister “had opened his parish to some of the ‘brown babies’.”¹⁶⁰ Wingate was able to help the couple, and in March 1947 the Lomaxs’ local welfare department in Ohio paid them a visit. After

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, Windrush: the Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain (London: Harper Collins, 1998): 75.

¹⁵⁹ “Scores seek ‘Brown Babies,’” Pittsburgh Courier 26 February 1949.

¹⁶⁰ “Here’s How Lomax Couple Got Baby,” Pittsburgh Courier 19 February 1949 and “First Adopted ‘Brown Baby’ is Here!” Pittsburgh Courier 12 February 1949. I have unfortunately been unable to find out anything more about him.

paying out \$200 for the child's travel expenses, Leon Lomax junior finally left London for the U.S. on December 31st 1948.¹⁶¹ Despite the fanfare of publicity greeting his arrival in the States, Leon Lomax had a fairly difficult childhood. His step-mother, who he called 'mom', was hard on him at times, punishing him for the philandering of his father. She died of a heart attack when Leon was eight and he was looked after by various aunts and uncles. His father married two or three more times and was hardly around. Leon junior recounts that at the age of nine, he once ran to hug his father, who he had not seen for some time, but his father simply stuck out his hand.¹⁶²

Concluding Thoughts

As we have seen, African-American newspapers took a great interest in the plight of the "brown babies" born in both Britain and Germany. This concern may have related in part to the desire to claim responsibility for offspring fathered by black GIs - to assert the pride of responsible, civic fatherhood denied to black men by Jim Crow.¹⁶³ There was also recognition that "these little illegitimate Negro kids will have a far more difficult time than the little illegitimate white kids" and thus "it really is up to the Negroes to help."¹⁶⁴ African Americans could step in as saviors of disadvantaged

¹⁶¹ "First Adopted 'Brown Baby' is Here!" Pittsburgh Courier 12 February 1949;

"Here's How Lomax Couple Got Baby," 19 February 1949.

¹⁶² Telephone interview with Leon Lomax, 10 October 2014.

¹⁶³ Plummer, "Brown Babies": 73.

¹⁶⁴ Ivan Harold Browning, "Voices Plea for Children of Negro Soldiers Overseas,"

Chicago Defender 29 March 1947.

Britons – a reversal of the nineteenth century imagery of white abolitionists saving black slaves, or white missionaries saving benighted Africans. This sense of mission was no doubt even stronger in the case of children born in Germany, since they were rescuing the children from a country with the legacy of National Socialist racism.¹⁶⁵ Yet these good intentions operated in a context where the very existence of these children was a challenge to segregation and the prohibition of interracial relationships – the reason that the Pittsburgh Courier labeled the “‘Brown Baby’ question” as controversial. These children were living proof of racial and sexual transgression as well as representing a “mongrelization” which some African Americans (and indeed some Britons) abhorred. They were disliked too by many white American veterans: Congressman Rankin dismissed the mothers of these babies as “the scum of the British Isles,” but white GIs deeply resented the fact that many British women had chosen black men over white, their babies symbolic of their transgressive choice.

In Britain these children were labeled “half-castes” and were thereby without a clear identity: being “half” something, whether half-white, half-blood or half-English, was to be incomplete. To Nella Last and to many British people, the babies unsettled a neat categorization of ethnicities and exact “color-coding.” As in Germany, where the term *Mischling* denoted a racial mixing that implied a lack of purity and was thus explicitly derogatory, the use of the term “half-caste” was indicative of prevailing social attitudes. The horror of inter-racial relationships was not so strong in Britain as in white America, but disapproval was widespread nevertheless. In the British empire, the desire to maintain “racial purity” and white supremacy involved a history of fearing interracial sex and marriage, and much attention had been paid to how to classify the subsequent

¹⁶⁵ Fehrenbach, Race after Hitler, 132-168.

progeny of these relationships.¹⁶⁶ In Britain too there was anxiety about how the children of mixed-race unions would “fit in,” for example, St Clair Drake noted the negative attitude of “one of the most important social workers in Britain” who “believed that any coloured child in an otherwise white community is virtually unassimilable.”¹⁶⁷

The British government also probably thought the children “unassimilable,” which no doubt contributed to their indecision as to how to act. It oscillated between attempts to simply remove the “problem” (exclusion through American adoption) and voicing a luke-warm commitment to some kind of inclusion/integration. While in February 1946 the Home Office appeared to be reconsidering its position (thinking it undesirable to imply that “there is no place for these coloured children in the United Kingdom”)¹⁶⁸ by January 1948 Chuter Ede was suddenly in favor of the children being sent to the U.S. – a position which Joseph-Mitchell of the LCP characterized as making it seem “as though coloured people were no longer wanted within the framework of British society.”¹⁶⁹ The following year the Home Office changed its mind again, although never did it openly embrace the children as British subjects - as ‘belonging’ to the British nation by right of birth.

¹⁶⁶ See Ann Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-century Colonial Cultures,” *American Ethnologist*, xvi (1989), 634-60; Robert Young *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995)142-158.

¹⁶⁷ St Clair Drake, “The League’s Sociological Approach”. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁶⁸ North American Department, Foreign Office to British Embassy, Washington, 19 February 1946, FO 371/51617, AN3/3/45, TNA.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph-Mitchell “The Colour Problem among Juveniles,” 5.

The government's (and others') ambivalence towards the "brown babies" primarily related to their being non-white and mixed-race and thus not truly "British," since Britishness assumed whiteness. But this inability to see the children as British also related to their being part-American. After the war, the GIs were not always looked on wholly favorably; the Americans had of course been official allies, but their wealth, bragging and cocksureness, not to mention their assumption of dominance in the alliance, was unappealing, especially to British men. Britain's dependence on America during and after the war was difficult for Britons to accept, despite all of the official pronouncements of this being a "special relationship." And the sight of GI babies was humiliating to the returning men – a sign of "their" women's sexual infidelity. A mixed-race GI baby stood out as a visual marker of the black soldier having indeed been both "over-here" and "over-sexed" - the "sore thumb" that Carole felt herself to be. Looked on askance by white GIs, returning British soldiers and certain African Americans and white Britons who wished to keep their respective races "pure", the "brown babies" of Britain carried the burden of standing symbolically for the enormous upheavals and contraventions of war.